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Morphological variation in the Spanish-speaking world

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1 Introduction

This work presents a selection of the most characteristic morphological variation phenomena of current Spanish. In section 2, we review some relevant concepts and data related to the Spanish-speaking world, as well as to geographical and morphological variation. Section 3 focuses on variation related to inflectional morphology. The phenomena are presented according to the different word classes involved: nouns, pronouns, verbs, and, finally, adverbs and quantifiers. As for variation in word formation, it is dealt with in section 4.

Keywords: American Spanish; European Spanish; inflectional morphology; word formation; variation

Este trabajo presenta una selección de los fenómenos de variación morfológica más característicos del español actual. En la sección 2 se revisan algunos conceptos y datos relevantes relacionados con el mundo hispanohablante, así como con la variación geográfica y morfológica. La sección 3 se centra en la variación en morfología flexiva. Los fenómenos se presentan atendiendo a la clase de palabras implicada: nombres, pronombres, verbos y, finalmente, adverbios y cuantificadores. Por lo que respecta a la variación en formación de palabras, esta se aborda en la sección 4.

Palabras clave: español de América; español de Europa; morfología flexiva; formación de palabras; variación

2 Presentation

In this chapter, we are interested in morphological variation in Spanish, whereas we will not deal with what is considered simply ‘lexical’ variation, in the sense that different roots are used (Feliu Arquiola 2017). Before presenting a selection of the most characteristic morphological variation phenomena of current Spanish, we will review some concepts in relation to the Spanish-speaking world, geographical variation, and morphological variation.

As we know, the Spanish-speaking world is formed by Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, South America, and Spain. There are also nations that have ‘minority’ populations of
Variation in the Spanish-speaking world

Spanish-speaking residents (e.g. United States, Belize, Philippines, and Equatorial Guinea). For the purposes of this chapter, we will distinguish American Spanish varieties (AS) from European Spanish varieties (ES), even if we are aware of this terminological reduction.

In the study of phonetic variation, the semantic equivalence is usually evident, but in the field of morphology (and syntax), it seems risky to affirm that two different options say ‘the same thing’ (à la Labov). Therefore, grammatical variation is more complex to study than phonetic or lexical variation; hence, sociolinguistic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive factors must be considered.

From a formalist approach, Fábregas and Gallego (2014) pointed out for the first time that there are three kinds of variation relevant to Spanish morphology:

1. The formal features might be different or might be distributed differently among the syntactic heads.
2. Even if the features and the exponents are identical, the operations that relate those features to exponents might be different in nature or be specified in different ways, or a system might have an extra operation that other systems lack.
3. The exponents themselves might be different, either because their morphophonological properties are distinct or because—even when they are identical in their morphophonology—they are associated with minimally distinct sets of features.

Following Fábregas and Gallego (2014), the main phenomena of morphological variation in Spanish are related to:

1. Verbal interpretable features: aspect, tense, and mood features like cantó ~ ha cantado (‘s/he sang ~ s/he has sung’) and subjunctive forms> indicative forms.
2. Nominal interpretable features: number and gender distinctions: bebe ~ beba ‘baby’, testigo ~ testiga ‘witness’; compounds (unos cads); pro-drop (Ø ~ strong pronouns).
3. Agreement: verbal (number: hayn ‘there are’, habían ‘there were’; person: habemos ‘we have’); nominal (camisa blanco ‘white shirt’); clitic doubling (Lo quiero a Juan ‘I like Juan’).
4. Case marking: differential object marking (DOM, with ñ); leísmo; con tú ~ contigo, con yo ~ conmigo (‘with you, with me’).
5. Ordering of exponents: enclitic and proclitic pronouns; clitic pronouns agreement (vendanlo ~ vendaloy ‘sell it’).
6. Different roles of the same exponent: affixes in word formation (e.g. -dero); special derivational exponents (e.g. -eco); productivity of an affix (e.g. -ito).

In what follows, we will focus on some of those phenomena, and we will present other cases of morphological variation in the Spanish-speaking world. Variation in inflectional morphology will be discussed in section 3, whereas variation in word formation will be addressed in section 4.

3 Variation in inflectional morphology

3.1 Nouns

3.1.1 Gender variation

In AS varieties (especially in the region of Río de la Plata, but also in Colombia and Bolivia), there is a tendency to use the feminine form of nouns that express professions traditionally performed by men. This occurs almost generally when the shape of the noun easily allows the
creation of feminine forms with exponent -a (1a), but it is also attested with nouns that have been traditionally considered invariable due to formal reasons (1b) (see Camacho, this volume):

\[(1)\]

a. \(el \text{ ministro} \sim \text{la ministra} \) ‘the minister’, \(el \text{ médico} \sim \text{la médica} \) ‘the doctor’, \(el \text{ arquitecto} \sim \text{la arquitecta} \) ‘the architect’, \(el \text{ ingeniero} \sim \text{la ingeniera} \) ‘the engineer’.

b. \(el \text{ juez} \sim \text{la jueza} \) ‘the judge’, \(el \text{ concejal} \sim \text{la concejala} \) ‘the councillor’, \(el \text{ fiscal} \sim \text{la fiscal} \) ‘the prosecutor’, \(el \text{ general} \sim \text{la general} \) ‘the (army) general’.

As for nouns that designate inanimate beings, in some Spanish-speaking countries, we can find gender hesitation, like \(el \text{ dinamo} \sim \text{la dinamo} \) (‘the dynamo’), \(el \text{ radio} \sim \text{la radio} \) (‘the radio’), as apocope of \(\text{radio} \text{receptor} \) (‘receiver’) and \(\text{radio} \text{difusión} \) (‘broadcasting’). Cases of gender hesitation are also recorded in some names ending in -e or in a consonant:

\[(2)\]

\(el \text{ mugre} \sim \text{la mugre} \) ‘the grime’, \(el \text{ calor} \sim \text{la calor} \) ‘the heat’, \(el \text{ azúcar} \sim \text{la azúcar} \) ‘the sugar’, \(el \text{ sartén} \sim \text{la sartén} \) ‘the pan’, \(el \text{ pus} \sim \text{la pus} \) ‘the pus’, \(el \text{ maíz} \sim \text{la maíz} \) ‘the corn’.

The masculine noun \(el \text{ sartén} \) (‘the pan.m’) is documented not only in American speakers but also in some speakers of the varieties of Spain (RAE/ASALE 2009, 117), specifically among those from the Canary Islands and Cádiz. On the other hand, even if the speakers assign the use of the masculine variant (el sartén) to rural areas and to the speech of people of low schooling (Moskowitz 2010), this use does not seem to be restricted only to speakers with a lower level of education (Bouzouita, Castillo, and Pato 2018). RAE and ASALE (2009, 97) indicate, for example, that the two gender variants of the noun azúcar (‘sugar’) are conditioned by geographical criteria. As for animate nouns, AS use of \(el \text{ bebé} \sim \text{la bebé} \) (‘the baby’) has extended even to ES.

### 3.1.2 Number variation

In ES nouns like those in (3a), which designate double objects (or multiple ones in the case of víveres), are more frequently used in the plural form. However, in some regions of AS (Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, Mexico, and others), they are also used in singular (3b). Both the plural and the singular forms have, in principle, the same meaning (RAE/ASALE 2018):

\[(3)\]

a. \(\text{paraguas} \) ‘umbrella’, \(\text{tijeras} \) ‘scissors’, \(\text{pinzas} \) ‘tweezers’, \(\text{pantalones} \) ‘pants’, \(\text{calzones} \) ‘breeches/drawers’, \(\text{tenazas} \) ‘tongs’, \(\text{víveres} \) ‘supplies’.

b. \(\text{paragua}, \text{tijera}, \text{pinza}, \text{pantalón}, \text{calzón}, \text{tijera}, \text{tenaza}, \text{víver}.\)

### 3.2 Pronouns

#### 3.2.1 Leísmo (using le)

In most parts of AS, the pronouns \(la/\text{las} \) and \(lo/\text{los} \) are used as a direct object and \(le/\text{les} \) as an indirect object. However, there is leísmo in the speech of several regions such as Paraguay, parts of Ecuador, and northwestern Argentina (4a, in contrast to 4b), basically due to language contact. That is, \(le/\text{les} \) are used for direct objects that designate male and female persons:

\[(4)\]

a. \(¿Y Ana? \text{ Recién le vi } \text{ tomando un colectivo al trabajo.} \)

\(And \ Ana? \text{ Just her saw.1sg taking a bus to work} \)

‘And Ana? I just saw her taking a bus to work’
b. ¿Y Ana? Acabo de ver-la cogiendo el autobús para ir a trabajar.
‘And Ana? I just saw her taking the bus to go to work’

3.2.2 Case agreement in object pronouns

As we know, normative Spanish shows little tolerance towards grammatical variation, even if some dialect phenomena are subjected to sociolinguistic filtering. This is the case of leísmo, laísmo, and loísmo. As Fernández-Ordóñez (1994, 1999) has shown, the deflected uses of unstressed pronouns (le, la, lo) are actually alternative pronominal paradigms where pronoun selection is carried out according to linguistic principles other than those that apply in standard Spanish (see Cuervo, this volume). She has also shown the connection between leísmo (using le), laísmo (using la), and loísmo (using lo) (Fernández-Ordóñez and Pato 2020).

Fernández-Ordóñez (1994, 1999) highlights the problems raised by traditional works that tried to explain leísmo, laísmo, and loísmo. On the one hand, the tendency to distinguish personal DO (with le and personal leísmo) from non-personal ones (with lo/la and without leísmo) explained personal leísmo but not why this confusion affects masculine objects, nor the reasons it can be accompanied by non-personal leísmo, laísmo, and loísmo. On the other hand, assigning pronouns by resorting to the gender of their antecedent, without considering their syntactic function, explained masculine leísmo and laísmo, but not why leísmo had not just been established for all types of masculine objects, being more frequent with personal antecedent ones. Nor did it explain that leísmo would not generalize in the plural, where it also alternates with loísmo.

Fernández-Ordóñez (2012) has also geographically delimited the areas that present leísmo, laísmo, and loísmo in ES. The multiple uses correspond to the existence of three major dialectal pronominal paradigms, alternatives to standard Spanish:

(5) a. Spanish in contact with the Basque language: le is used for [+animated] masculine and feminine (A Jon/Itziar le veo ‘I see Jon/Itziar’), and null pronouns for [-animate] (El libro Ø tengo ahí ‘The book I have it there’).

b. Cantabrian: le is used for [+countable] masculine (A Antonio le veo ‘I see Antonio’; El bolso le tengo en casa ‘The bag I have it at home’) and lo for [-countable] masculine and feminine (El vino lo bebemos ‘The wine we drink it’; La leche lo bebemos ‘The milk we drink it’).

c. Castilian: case distinctions between DO and IO have been eliminated. Pronouns are assigned according to their number, and [+countable] interpretation. Le is used for [+countable] masculine (A Antonio le veo ‘I see Antonio’; El bolso le tengo en casa ‘The bag I have it at home’). The northern peninsular area uses le also in plural (Los libros le tiene ‘The books I have them’). Lo for [-countable] masculine and feminine (El vino lo bebemos ‘The wine we drink it’; La leche lo bebemos ‘The milk we drink it’); also with IO (A la leche lo echan cuajo ‘They add rennet to the milk’). La/las is used for feminine IO (La doy un beso ‘I give her a kiss’; No las gusta coser ‘They do not like to sew’); and los for IO in some areas (A los niños los gusta mucho el chocolate ‘Children like chocolate a lot’).

In sum, the ‘Basque’ paradigm (5a) represents an extension of the dative (le) to personal objects, both masculine and feminine. In Cantabrian (5b) and Castilian (5c) paradigms, the pronominal selection is based on the [+countable] categorization of the antecedent. This explains why leísmo is universal with masculine personal antecedents (always [+countable]).
but not with non-personal ones, since they can be [+countable] (referred by le) or [-countable] (referred by lo).

The Castilian paradigm is distinguished from the Cantabrian one by having eliminated the case category, generalizing la(s) and lo as IO pronouns. In addition, with masculine plurals, it presents two different solutions: 1) the les form in the north (northwest of Burgos, Palencia, and Valladolid); and 2) the los form in the south (east of Cáceres and Salamanca, Ávila, west of Toledo, and north of Madrid).

### 3.3 Verbs

#### 3.3.1 -ra/-se forms

The duplicity of these imperfect subjunctive forms is something exceptional in Spanish grammar (Zacarías Ponce, this volume, on verbal inflection generally). The most common hypothesis is that this variation should be resolved by means of the specialization of each form for a single value or through the disappearance of one of them (Rojo 1996, 677).

Several studies have shown the percentage distribution of these forms. The form in -ra is used in greater proportion than the form in -se (RAE/ASALE 2009, 1803). In this regard, it is interesting to contrast what happens, for example, in the speech of Caracas (Asratián 2007, 20), where -ra form obtains 94% and -se form 6%, compared to what is documented in ES (Kempas 2011, 259), where -ra reaches 77.1% and -se 22.9% (data from Madrid, Zaragoza, Granada, Santander, Tolosa, Barcelona, Castellón, Lugo, and Vigo).

The comparison has also been made between ES and AS (De Sterck 2000, 97). This author shows the differences in use in written language (51.32% in ES and 73.49% in AS for -ra vs. 48.68% in ES and 26.52% in AS for -se) and in spoken language (84.11% in ES and 94.05% in AS for -ra vs. 15.89% in ES and 5.95% in AS for -se), where the differences are bigger.

As we can see, these data are conclusive and show that in AS the use of the form in -se is simplified and reduced much more than in ES. In fact, “the variants in -se are considered too high, or even affected, in the oral language of some American countries” (RAE/ASALE 2009, 1803, our translation). This means that the ‘register’ variable is more important than the geographical one. The aforementioned studies assign the form in -se to written modalities and to more formal communicative situations.

Previous work has also shown the differences between these forms in relation to other aspects, as can be seen in (6b): greater or lesser assertiveness (-ra, and -se), greater or lesser distance (-se and -ra), greater or lesser formality (-se and -ra). The general process of semantic weakening of the forms used to transmit modality ultimately triggers their loss (Silva Corvalán 1985, 548). On the other hand, the indicative origin of -ra ( separates), compared to the subjunctive -se (se), has consequences for synchrony.

(6) a. Es probable que él le contara ~ contase todo ayer.
   Is likely that he him/her.dat told.3sg/told.3sg everything yesterday
   ‘It is likely that he told him/her everything yesterday’

b. Perdone, quisiera ~*quisiese preguntar-le algo.
   Excuse.3sg, would like.1sg ask-you.dat something
   ‘Excuse me, I would like to ask you something’
### 3.3.2 Ustedeo and voseo in inflection

Voseo is the option chosen by Argentinian and Venezuelan (mostly Zulianos) speakers but also by Costa Ricans, Chileans, and Colombians (caleños) (RAE/ASA LE 2009, 201–11). From a sociolinguistic point of view, it has been shown that voseo can be maintained among speakers from voseante areas when they settle in tuteante spaces (due to linguistic loyalty to the norm of origin), but in situations of high mobility, a tendency toward leveling by dialectal contact is imposed (Bouzouita, Castillo, and Pato 2018).

Usted ‘you.sg’ (<vuestra merced ‘your grace’) and ustedes ‘you.pl’ forms function as formal and deferential second person tonic pronouns; gender is marked only on corresponding clitics:

(7) a. A usted la conozco.
    *you.sg* you.f.sg know.1sg
    ‘I know you’

b. Ustedes habláis ~ ustedes hablan.
    *you.pl* talk.2pl ~ *you.pl* talk.3pl
    ‘You talk’

Ustedes use as a unique form of treatment in Western Andalusia, the Canary Islands, and part of America is accompanied by the immobilization of the verb in the 2pl, regardless of the formality of the treatment. The geographical distribution reveals that the agreement of 3pl progressed at the expense of 2pl, arranged as successive waves around the focal area formed by Cádiz and the South of Seville: ustedes (subject or term of preposition) > se clitic reflexive > verb (restricted) (8a–c) (Lara Bermejo 2016, Fernández-Ordóñez pc). In the Canary Islands and AS, on the other hand, verbal inflection and concordant clitics are always expressed in 3pl (8d–e).

(8) a. Ustedes, ¿coméis en casa? [± formal]
    *you.pl* eat.2pl *at home*
    ‘Do you eat at home?’

b. Se vais a caer. (‘Os vais a caer’)
    *se* go.2pl to fall
    ‘You are going to fall’

c. Decir lo que quieran. (‘Decid lo que queráis’)
    Say *what* want.3pl
    ‘Say what you want’

d. Ustedes, ¿comen en casa? [± formal]
    *you.pl* eat.3pl *at home*
    ‘Do you eat at home?’

e. Se van a caer.
    *se* go.3pl to fall
    ‘You are going to fall’

In sum, in ES, the extension of the 3pl concordance referred to ustedes has four major areas: 1) west of Huelva, center of Córdoba, and east of Malaga (*ustedes se.2pl V.2pl*); 2) east of Huelva, Seville, south of Córdoba, and west of Malaga (*ustedes se.3pl V.2pl*); 3) Cádiz and south of Seville (*ustedes se.3pl V.2pl/3pl*); and 4) Canary Islands (*ustedes se.3pl V.3pl*).
3.3.3 Plural subject reflexive -sen

Another example of variable expression of number agreement is provided by the infinitives (9, *irse*) and gerunds (9, *metiéndose*) of pronominal verbs or reflexive constructions with 3pl subjects (Harris and Halle 2005; Heap and Pato 2012; Mare 2018; Fernández-Ordóñez and Pato 2020, Cuervo, this volume).

(9) **T enían que irsen para que no estuvieran las chicas por los pisos metiéndosen con hombres.**  
*Have.3pl to go.pl so that not were.3pl the girls in the apartments messing.pl with men*  
‘They had to go to, so that the girls were not on the apartments messing with men’

This agreement in the non-personal forms of pronominal verbs and of verbs in reflexive construction is a characteristic of the eastern zone of Spain (Navarrese-Aragonese and Castilian), but it is also attested in AS. Although currently forms in *se* predominate (*irse*), agreement affects all types of verbs and reflexive constructions: direct reflexives (10a), reciprocals (10b), indirect reflexives (*hacerse* ‘to make.pl’), anti-causatives (*para se cansar* ‘to dry.pl’), convertives (*preocuparse un poco* ‘to worry.pl a little’), and even intransitive (*salirse* ‘to go out.pl’) and transitive (*comprarse cosas* ‘to by.pl things’) verbs without valency change, in addition to non-reversible (*pitorearse de nosotros* ‘to make fun.pl of us’). The concordance extends to the passive reflex, although the argument is not specific (10c) (Fernández-Ordóñez and Pato 2020).

(10) a. No quieren abrigarse.  
*Not want.3pl to shelter.pl*  
‘They do not want to shelter’

b. Casarse no se casaron.  
*Get married.pl not get married.3pl*  
‘Get married they didn’t get married’

c. Después de la guerra ya echaron a formarse sindicatos.  
*After the war already start.3pl to make.3pl trade unions*  
‘After the war trade unions have already started’

Mare (2018) has also described the different linguistic contexts for the occurrence of enclitic –*n*: infinitive and gerund periphrasis, control and causatives constructions, infinitives as preposition complements, and adverbial constructions. This author has also shown all the main possibilities of occurrence of –*n* and a clitic pronoun in the imperative form: displacement and copy:

(11) a. venda-me-η-lo  
*sell.me.dat-pl.n-it.acc*  
‘sell it to me’

b. venda-me-lo-η  
*sell.me.dat-it.acc-pl.n*  
[displacement, displacement]

c. venda-η-me-η-lo  
*sell-n-me.dat-pl.n-it.acc*  
[copy]
3.3.4 *Indicative imperfect (second and third conjugations) in -ba*

The imperfect of the second and third conjugation maintains or extends analogically -*ba*- in its formation (12a queriba, 12b traiba) (Pato 2018). The presence of -*ba*- is more frequent with verbs whose root ends in a vowel, both in the Peninsula (eastern Castilian area) and the Canary Islands and in AS. Therefore, it can be understood as an analogical strategy, based on the morpheme -*ba* of the first conjugation and supported by the imperfect of the verb *ir* (iba, ‘I/he/she/it was going’), with which it is sought to undo the original hiatus.

(12) a. Yo queriba ser la chica de tus sueños.
    *I wanted to be the girl of your dreams*
    ‘I wanted to be the girl of your dreams’

b. Había un barco que te llevaba todos los días a Mahón y te traiba.
    *There was a ship that you took every day to Mahon and you brought*
    ‘There was a ship that took you every day to Mahon and brought you back’

3.3.5 *Analogical strong preterites*

Another phenomenon of variation is the use of -n (instead of -eron) as the 3pl desinence in the perfect strong preterites (see Camus, this volume): *dijon* (decir, ‘they said’), *puson* (poner, ‘they put’), *estuvon* (estar, ‘they were’) (Pato 2010b). This is an (historical) analogical use in some ES varieties: the east-central Leonese, the western Castilian, and the Extremaduran.

(13) Después estuvon en Kuwait, allí estuvon tres años; cuando empezó la guerra del Golfo se vinieron.
    *Afterwards they were in Kuwait, they were there for three years; when the Gulf War began they came back*

3.4 *Adverbs and quantifiers*

3.4.1 *Agreeing adverbial quantifiers*

There is a general tendency to make the quantifier *medio* (‘half’) (14a) and other quantifiers like *bastante* (‘enough’), *poco* (‘little/few’), or *demasiado* (‘too much’) (14b) agree with the adjective they modifies (Pato 2010a; Felíu Arquiola 2012; Felíu Arquiola and Pato 2015a, 2015b, 2020). This agreeing use of adverbial quantifiers is considered non-normative in descriptive grammars.

(14) a. Esa mujer está media loca.
    *That woman is half crazy*

b. Mis hijas están demasiadas cansadas.
    *My daughters are too tired*
3.4.2 Recién

In ES, recién behaves as an aspectual modifier (‘just, newly’) which combines with adjectival participles (flores recién cortadas ‘flowers freshly cut’). It always precedes the adjectival participle, with which it can form a nominalized expression (el recién nacido ‘the newborn’). It has been considered a prefix from a morphological point of view (Martín García and Varela Ortega 2007). However, in AS varieties, especially in Rio de la Plata, the use of recién before the conjugated verb is frequently attested, with the temporary value of ahora mismo (‘right now’), apenas (‘barely’), or the periphrasis acabar de + infinitivo (‘to finish + infinitive’) (Pato 2001) (15a). In these varieties, recién can also appear in postverbal position (15b), like other adverbs.

(15) a. Recién me entero de la noticia.
   ‘I just heard the news’
   b. Alguien llamó recién.
   ‘Someone just called’

3.4.3 From adjectives to adverbs

The tendency to ‘transform’ adjectives into adverbs is widespread in AS (Di Tullio 2001; Hummel 2014).

(16) a. El profesor nos habló lindo.
   ‘The professor spoke to us cute’
   b. Carmen canta bonito.
   ‘Carmen sings pretty’

Many of those adverb adjectives allow scalarity, with diminutives (volar bajito ‘fly low’), and admit elements that express gradation (hablar muy despacio ‘to speak very slowly’), synthetic –ísimo (apetaba feísimo ‘It sucked ugly’), and quantifiers (pisar bien firme ‘stomp’), as well as adverbs in -mente (trabaja increíblemente duro ‘s/he works incredibly hard’). They also admit expansion (hilar todo lo fino que se pueda ‘spinning as fine as possible’) and may coordinate with each other (hablar alto y claro ‘to speak loud and clear’). They usually only modify verbs, not adjectives or participles (*fuerte golpeado, but fuertemente golpeado ‘hit *hard/hardly’), or other adverbs (*claro lejos ‘clear away’). However, with certain participles of transitive and unaccusative verbs, they are admitted (atado firme ‘firm tied’, but *firma atado ‘tied firm’).

From a semantic point of view, they deal with various concepts: intensive (hablar lento/fuerte ‘to talk slow/strong’), frequent (hablar seguido ‘to talk often’), durative (hablar largo ‘to talk long’), positive (hablar bonito ‘to talk pretty’), and space (hablar profundo ‘to talk deep’).

4 Variation in word formation

As Fábregas and Gallego (2014) and Felíu Arquiola (2017) have discussed, word formation, like any other linguistic level, is also subject to variation (see also Carriscondo, Cremades, and Guerrero 2017), although it has been less studied than inflectional morphology. The reason
word formation has been relegated to the background in variation studies in favor of inflectional morphology may be the fact that inflectional morphology fits better with the definition of variation as “different ways of saying the same thing”.

Variation in word formation manifests itself in different ways. For example, affix rivalry can be considered an instance of strict variation, as in aburrimiento ~ aburrición (‘boredom’) or in alineamiento ~ alineación (‘alignment’) (Zacarías Ponce de León 2010). In this section, we will focus on two word-formation processes. On the one hand, we will deal with diminutive suffixation. On the other hand, we will focus on eventive noun formation with the suffix -da, in which variation in the subcategorial selection of the base is involved.

4.1 Diminutive suffix -ito

The Spanish language is well known for its rich inventory and frequent use of evaluative affixes, including diminutive, augmentative, and pejorative suffixes. These affixes do not change the category of the corresponding word but lend particular nuances to their meaning in context (smallness, affection, pejoration, intensification, euphemism, emphasis, approximation, irony) (for some accounts, see Fortin 2011; Tuten, Pato, and Schwarzwald 2016, and Kornfeld, this volume).

The most commonly used diminutive in AS is -ito (ahorita y todito ‘right now and all’) (Bouzouita, Castillo, and Pato 2018), which may have the value of greater expressiveness repeating itself as in the cases of ahoritita (‘right now’) and toditito (‘all’). The diminutive -ico is also used very frequently in Central America and in some areas of Colombia when the word ends in /t/ + vowel (zapato > zapatico ‘shoe’).

There is a difference between ES and AS varieties related to the form of the diminutive suffix. As is well known, in Spanish -ito can generally appear in three different forms: -itV (casita ‘little house’), -citV (cancioncita ‘little song’), and -ecitV (florecita ‘little flower’). The main differences between varieties arise in: 1) bisyllabic bases ending in vowel /o, a/ with a diphthong in the first syllable (viejo > viejecito (ES) ~ viejito (AS) ‘little old man’), and 2) monosyllabic bases ending in a consonant (bar > barecito (ES) ~ barcito (AS) ‘little bar’).

Finally, in ES, there is wide variation in the use of diminutive suffixes: -ete is especially used in Valencia, Murcia, Albacete, and Cuenca; -illo in Andalusia; -ico in Navarra, Aragon, Murcia, and Granada; -in in Asturias and León; -ino in Extremadura; and -uco in Cantabria (RAE/ASALE 2009; Bouzouita, Castillo, and Pato 2018).

4.2 Eventive noun formation with suffix -da

Generally, the suffix -da forms eventive nouns from verbal bases: entrada (‘entrance’), caída (‘fall’) (Beniers 1977; Bordelois 1993, Resnik, this volume on nominalization more generally). However, there is geographical variation related to the subtype of verbal base that this suffix selects (Mondoñedo 2012): -da combines with transitive verbs (17a) as well as with unaccusative verbs (17b) both in AS and in ES. However, suffix -da also forms eventive nouns from unergative verbs in some AS varieties (17c) (Fábregas and Gallego 2014; Felíu Arquiola 2017):

(17) a. acampar ‘to camp’ > acampada ‘camping’; acoger ‘to welcome’ > acogida ‘welcome’.
   b. partir ‘to leave’ > partida ‘leaving, departure’; llegar ‘to arrive’ > llegada ‘arrival’.
   c. conversar ‘to talk’ > conversada ‘talking’; bostezar ‘to yawn’ > bostezada ‘yawn’.

77
5 Conclusions and some theoretical implications

This chapter has shown some of the morphological variation phenomena in the Spanish-speaking world. We have seen that variation affects both inflectional morphology and word formation. In the case of inflectional morphology, variation phenomena involve different word-classes and different features: nouns (gender and number variation), pronouns (léismo and case agreement in object pronouns), verbs (-ra/-se forms, ustedeo and voseo in inflection, plural subjective reflexive -sen, indicative imperfect in -ba with verbs from the second and third conjugation, analogical strong preterites), and adverbs and quantifiers (agreeing adverbial quantifiers, the case of recién, the transformation of adjectives into adverbs). As for variation in word formation, although less studied, we have mentioned the case of diminutive suffixes and eventive noun formation with the suffix -da.

As Starke (2011, 1) reflects, “three decades after the ‘Principles and Parameters’ revolution in language variation, we still have no theory of variation”. From a formalist approach to linguistic variation, there are two kinds of variation: macro-parametric and micro-parametric. In the first one, variation has its locus in UG operations. In the second one, variation is founded in the lexicon. Nonetheless, as Fábregas and Gallego (2014) pointed out, the macro and micro positions can be seen as complementary. Following these authors, the lexicalist version has a pre-syntactic lexicon, while the non-lexicalist version has two independent lists whose members (abstract features and exponents or phon features) are arbitrarily associated.

One of the new theoretical approaches to cross-linguistic variation proposes that it “can be expressed in terms of lexical elements spelling out bigger or smaller subconstituents of the syntactic structure being built by the computational system” (Starke 2011, 13). In sum, this author defends the idea that variation is lexical: “since lexical items are made out of grammatical ‘features’, saying that variation is lexical amounts to saying that variation will be variation in features” (Starke 2011, 2). That solution builds on the idea of phrasal spell out, where a string of terminal nodes like [a [b [c]]] can be spelled out by a single exponent, or lexical item.

Additionally, from a methodological point of view, explanatory hypotheses cannot be created solely on the data offered by the formal written language. On the other hand, some of the features we have presented are considered universal vernacular (examples in 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 17) (Szmrecsanyi and Kortmann 2009). In short, the concept of universal vernacular helps us to better understand how the apparent dichotomy between ‘conservation’ and ‘innovation’ can be overcome, since vernacular forms are the result of universal cognitive processes that are activated according to the input of each dialect or variety and can be at the same time ancient and modern forms.

Notes

1 Standard Spanish uses lo(s) for masculine and neuter DO, la(s) for feminine DO, and le(s) for IO.
2 We will not discuss here if these variants are allomorphs (-íte, -ítio, -íció) or if we are dealing with suffix -íto preceded by an interfix (-rito, -etó).

References

Variation in the Spanish-speaking world


